

**Statement delivered by Ms. Reita Toussaint, Permanent Secretary,
Ministry of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs on behalf of Senator the
Honourable Dennis Moses, Minister of Foreign and CARICOM Affairs,
at a Reception to celebrate the Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of
Japan,
February 5, 2020**

Your Excellency Tatsuo Hirayama, Ambassador of Japan, and Mrs. Sachiko Hirayama;

Distinguished Cabinet Ministers;

Your Excellencies, Heads of Mission and Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Members of Staff of the Embassy of Japan;

Specially invited guests;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

Good evening.

It is an honour to extend greetings on the occasion of the Birthday of His Majesty the Emperor of Japan, which is being celebrated in Japan and around the world on February 23 for the very first time.

Japan turned the page on a new chapter in its history when His Majesty acceded to the Chrysanthemum Throne in May last year, symbolising the start of the *Reiwa* (pronounced *Ray-wa*) era. On the occasion of his formal enthronement several months later, His Majesty the Emperor gave the assurance that as the symbol of the State and of the unity of the Japanese people, he would stand in solidarity with all citizens. His Majesty also expressed the hope, perhaps in recognition of Japan's role in the international community, that his country would contribute to world peace and friendship.

On behalf of Dr. the Honourable Keith Rowley, Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and the Government and People of this country, I extend best wishes for the health, happiness and illustrious reign of His Majesty the Emperor.

Ambassador, I recognise that tonight is equally historic for you – it is your very first National Day reception. Given that you have been in Trinidad and Tobago for some time, I truly hope that your tour of duty has been professionally and personally rewarding thus far.

The past year has marked a number of milestones for the Trinidad and Tobago/Japan relationship, which was formally established over fifty-five (55) years ago and currently involves exchanges in energy, trade, education, culture, sport and technical expertise. In the last year, we marked the fortieth (40th) anniversary of the establishment of the Embassy of Japan in Port of Spain and celebrated the fifteenth year of the Japan Exchange and Teaching

(JET) Programme in Trinidad and Tobago, through which Trinidad and Tobago nationals travel to Japan to assist in teaching the English language.

In recognition of its work to promote mutual understanding between our countries, the Centre for Language Learning (CLL) of the University of the West Indies was awarded the Commendation of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan in August 2019. Similarly, the JET Alumni Association received the Commendation of the Ambassador of Japan last October.

Those highlights notwithstanding, existing bilateral cooperation continued unabated. As an example, through the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) Trinidad and Tobago continued to receive training opportunities in specialised areas, including disaster risk reduction, solid waste management and coastal protection. Educational and funding assistance was available under the Japanese Government (MEXT) Scholarship Programme and the Grant Assistance for Grassroots Human Security Projects (GGP), respectively.

Our collaboration extended to the multilateral context, with Trinidad and Tobago supporting Japan in its bid for a seat on the United Nations Human Rights Council for the period 2020 to 2022.

I believe that the upcoming twelve (12) months likewise hold much promise. Thus far, Trinidad and Tobago was represented at the recently concluded Juntos Programme, which seeks to promote greater mutual understanding between Japan and Latin America and the Caribbean through people-to-people exchanges.

Trinidad and Tobago and Japan will engage in discussions next month under the umbrella of the CARICOM-Japan Consultation, which has been a longstanding avenue for the promotion of cooperation at the regional level. We look forward with anticipation to the upcoming Olympic Games.

Some of you may remember that it was at the 1964 Tokyo Games that Trinidad and Tobago won its first medals in athletics, including a bronze for the Men's 4 x 400 metres relay.

As I close, I wish His Majesty the Emperor every success in his new role. May the *Reiwa* era usher in even greater prosperity for the Japanese people. In a similar vein, I look forward to the strengthening of ties between Trinidad and Tobago and Japan in 2020 and beyond, to which this Government remains committed.

I thank you.